



Jansson, Eugène Frederik (1862-1915)

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Pushing Weights With Two Arms Number 3 by Eugène Frederik Jansson (1914).

Although well known in his native Sweden, the painter Eugène Jansson has only recently begun to receive the international attention that his accomplishments merit. During the past decade, queer commentators have proclaimed Jansson as Sweden's first gay artist. This reputation is based primarily upon the paintings that he produced during the final decade of his life.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, Jansson had achieved both critical acclaim and financial success. However, in 1904, he suddenly stopped producing the nocturnal cityscapes that had been so eagerly sought by Swedish collectors. Thereafter, he devoted himself to depicting young workers, sailors, and athletes--usually shown nude.

Jansson's late paintings of men eloquently reveal the strong attraction that he felt for his subjects. The artist developed close personal friendships and relationships with several of his models--most notably with Knut Nyman (1887-1946), with whom he lived from 1907 to 1913.

Particularly noteworthy from the point of view of queer cultural history are the monumental paintings of Stockholm's Naval Bathhouse (Flottans badhus). In these provocative works, he conveyed the erotic energy pervading this establishment for nude bathing, which was frequented by the artist and other homosexual men.

Throughout his career, Jansson expressed a notable sympathy for outsiders. Although infused with melancholy lyricism, many of the cityscapes that he produced between 1890 and 1904 reveal the harsh conditions prevailing in the working-class neighborhoods of Stockholm. A committed socialist, Jansson was an early and active member of the Artists' Union, which sought to encourage participation of workers in the visual arts. Jansson's political convictions were consistent with his own background.

Background and early years

Jansson was born on March 18, 1862 in Stockholm, where he resided for the rest of his life, except for a few trips to other parts of Europe. His given names--Eugène and Frederik--pay tribute to both his mother, Eugenia, and his father, Frederik.

Employed as a messenger by the Post Office, Frederik Jansson was able to provide only a modest standard of living for his family. Nevertheless, he and his wife Eugenia cultivated a strong interest in the arts, especially music, and they hoped that Eugène would become a professional musician. In his later years, Eugène indicated that the strong emphasis placed on music by his family influenced his concern with evoking moods in his paintings.

Frederik Jansson was a very skilled amateur flautist. His wife aspired to be a professional singer, but her nervous disposition inhibited her realization of that goal. Eugenia also had an interest in the visual arts, and she occasionally painted still lifes for her own pleasure.

Despite their limited resources, Frederik and Eugenia made sure that both Eugène and his younger brother Adrian (1871-1937) received outstanding educations. In 1871, after several years of preparatory education, Eugène enrolled in Stockholm's prestigious German School (Tyska Skola). An outstanding student, Eugène received high marks in academic subjects and drawing. However, to the dismay of his parents, he performed poorly in music classes.

During his childhood, Eugène began to suffer from serious health problems. In 1874, when he was twelve years old, he was treated for a retinal detachment in one of his eyes. In the same year, he was diagnosed with a severe congenital heart condition that would plague him for the rest of his life.

In 1875, he became ill with scarlet fever, which permanently impacted his health, leaving him with chronic kidney problems and impaired hearing. Jansson's hearing worsened throughout his later years, and he had become virtually deaf by the early 1900s.

While Eugène was recovering from scarlet fever, his physicians predicted that he would die before the age of twenty. Determined to live as full and long a life as possible, he began a program of rigorous physical exercise, which helped to improve his health. Although his heart condition sometimes restricted his activities, he continued to exercise until the final years of his life. Given this personal history, the athletic men shown in his late paintings must have had great psychological resonance for the artist.

Professional Education and Early Stages of His Career

When he completed his studies at the German School in 1876, Jansson aspired to a career in the visual arts. However, disappointed by his son's apparent lack of musical talent, Frederik insisted that Eugène instead accept employment in a store so that he could contribute financially to the support of the family. Fortunately, Frederik eventually relented and offered to help support his son while he prepared for a career as a painter.

In 1879, Eugène began to take classes in arts and design at the Technical School (Tekniska Skolan, now Konstfack). Among Jansson's first works were still life paintings and portraits of family members. One of his teachers, Edvard Perséus (1840-1890), a prominent artist appointed to the court of King Oscar II, strongly encouraged him to develop his potential and to undertake an artistic career.

Upon the recommendation of Perséus, Jansson secured admission to The Royal Academy of Fine Arts (Kungliga Akademi för de Fria Konsterna), where he studied between 1881 and 1883. Although the still life paintings that Jansson executed while at the Academy were highly praised by his instructors, he never took the required culminating examinations to receive a degree.

Jansson's studies at the Academy were supervised by Georg von Rosen (1843-1923), known for his paintings of historical subjects. Already interested in recent naturalistic trends in art, Jansson found the traditional curriculum promoted by von Rosen to be irrelevant.

A number of other factors probably contributed to Jansson's decision to leave the Academy without obtaining the credentials, then considered an essential prerequisite to a successful career as an artist in Sweden. With his working-class background, Jansson did not fit well into the aristocratic milieu of the Academy, which was as conservative politically and socially as it was artistically. According to several accounts, other students at the Academy ridiculed his plain clothes, shy mannerisms, poor hearing, and other physical disabilities.

Upon leaving the Academy, Jansson was immediately offered a position in the workshop of Perséus, and he

was able to supplement his income by selling some of his still life paintings independently. Despite his prestigious official position, Perséus was one of the leaders of the Opponents (Opponenterna), and he encouraged Jansson to become an active member of this group of radical artists, who sought to revolutionize cultural life in Sweden.

Jansson enthusiastically allied himself with the Opponents, and he participated in the exhibition held by them at the Blanch Gallery in 1885. Also in 1885, Jansson was one of the eighty-four artists who signed a petition presented to the Academy demanding that students be able to select their own teachers and that scholarships be determined by a committee composed equally of Opponents and members of the Academy.

In 1886, Jansson became one of the founding members of the Artists' Union (Konstnärsförbundet), intended to provide a legitimate alternative to the Academy and to encourage the development of aesthetically advanced and socially conscious art in Sweden through an ambitious program of exhibitions and instructional programs. Jansson was an active member of the Union throughout his life, and he often served as its Secretary.

Encouraged by Perséus and by the artists that he met through the Opponents and Union, Jansson sought to broaden his range of themes and to develop his potential as a painter of contemporary figurative subjects and of urban scenes.

An early example of these efforts, *Boys Going for a Swim* (1884, Frederik Strömblad, Stockholm) provides an intriguing premonition of the later bathhouse scenes. In the middleground, a nude boy (with his back to the viewer) is shown diving into the water, while five other boys are depicted in the process of taking off their clothes. Bright sunlight infuses the scene and modulates the blues of the sky and water and the greens of the grass.

Despite Jansson's resistance to the principles of the Academy, the carefully balanced organization of the figures across the surface of this picture accords with the classical principles that he would have learned there. Even though the boys seem a bit rigidly posed, they demonstrate Jansson's ability to create naturalistically convincing figures. Rejecting the idealized types of the classical tradition, Jansson accurately depicts the clothes and demeanor of working-class youths.

During the later 1880s, he painted sun-drenched views of streets in Stockholm and outlying areas, such as *Roslagsgatan* and *Döbelgsaten* (both 1889, Thielska Galleriet, Stockholm). In these works, Jansson was strongly influenced by the modified version of Impressionism introduced to Sweden by artists such as his friend Karl Nördstrom (1855-1923), who had lived in France from 1881 until 1886.

Jansson initially was introduced to Nördstrom by Perséus, who had taught him in the years 1875 to 1878. As Jansson later did, Nördstrom failed to complete his exams at the Academy, where he studied from 1878 to 1880. Nördstrom became the first president of the Artists' Union, and he and Jansson worked together on various projects for that organization. With numerous shared experiences and interests, they remained close associates for the rest of Jansson's life.

Jansson's friendships with Nördstrom and other artists and his active involvement in the Artists' Union belie the characterization of him by many historians as lonely and isolated.

Jansson's Career, 1890-1904

By the late 1880s, Jansson was beginning to become established in his profession in the Swedish capital. However, the sudden death of Perséus in 1890 drastically altered his circumstances, depriving him of his primary source of income as well as of the personal and professional support of his mentor.

Jansson was forced to depend once again on the financial assistance of his father. However, in 1891, Frederik Jansson died suddenly from pleurisy. As a result, Eugène became the head of the household, and he assumed responsibility for the care of his mother and brother. Unfortunately, he was able to make very little money from the occasional sale of still life paintings.

Due to their severely reduced economic situation, the family moved to the Södermalm, then one of the most impoverished slums in Stockholm. Although the entire Jansson family felt depressed by their altered circumstances, Eugène ultimately found profound artistic inspiration in his new environs.

The pictures of the mid- and later-1890s marked a significant break with Jansson's earlier work. Lush depictions of sun-drenched streets were replaced by somber images of desolate working-class neighborhoods. Contributing significantly to the melancholy and mysterious mood of many of his cityscapes are the deep blue and grey tones that dominated his palette during this era.

By the mid-1890s, Jansson developed a new and very distinctive technique of handling of paint. Jansson first covered the canvas with very thin layers of irregularly applied paint strokes. Above these, he built up thick layers of heavily textured brushstrokes of great expressive power. Finally, he scraped off scattered segments of the upper layers of paint with a palette knife--thus exposing the canvas weave, which contributes significantly to the textural richness of the completed painting. Facos has proposed that the sheer labor evident in Jansson's technique served to underline his commitment to the workers' movement.

Undoubtedly, Jansson's dramatically altered personal circumstances profoundly influenced the transformation of the subject matter, style, and mood of his paintings. He also drew inspiration from a wide variety of artistic sources.

Among the painters who most strongly influenced his work are the following: the Norwegian Edward Munch (1863-1944), whose works were presented in a major solo exhibition in Stockholm in 1894; the American expatriate James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903), whose *Nocturnes* were much admired in Scandinavia; and the Dutch Post-Impressionist Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890), whose bold handling of paint was promoted in Sweden by such artists as Nils Kreuger (1858-1930).

Living on the hills of the Södermalm, Jansson was deeply impressed by the views across the Riddarfjärden bay toward the northern part of the city, and he became the first artist to represent them. Beginning in 1893, Jansson made numerous paintings of Stockholm at dusk and dawn, as seen from his apartment. Like Whistler, Jansson seems to have been fascinated with the appearance of shore lights and their reflections.

Jansson's earliest cityscapes of 1893 and 1894 include much more detail than his later work. Influenced by Munch, Jansson simplified his cityscapes and made them more expressive by the mid-1890s. A characteristic painting of that period, *Southern Strand* (1896, Thielska Galleriet, Stockholm) is dominated by bold shapes with flowing contours. In this painting, Jansson handles brushwork in an almost calligraphic fashion--utilizing distinct systems of curly and undulating strokes to identify the water and land and to differentiate these primary topographic elements from one another.

In the early twenty-first century, the *Southern Strand* and other views by Jansson can easily seem nostalgic to viewers. However, Jansson represented the most recent industrial and technological developments, and he often suggested their devastating impact upon the urban environment. In *Southern Strand*, for example, dense industrial pollution absorbs and diminishes the light produced by the row of gas street lamps. Moreover, the heavy, dark shapes of the factories in the foreground seem almost menacing. In *The Train* (ca 1895, private collection), the picture surface is dominated by the tracks that literally seem to slash the landscape. Angular shapes, heavy brush strokes, and the rough texture of the canvas weave all contribute to the expressive impact of this painting.

By the late 1890s, Jansson generally created cityscapes from memory rather than from direct observation. According to Nördstrom and other contemporaries, the artist believed that this method enabled him to convey most effectively the feelings that he experienced while gazing at his city. In such paintings as *Dawn over Riddarfjärden* (1899, Prins Eugens Waldemarsdöden, Stockholm), forms are rendered summarily, and Jansson evokes "a nearly hallucinatory mood of beauty and mystery," as Varnedoe noted. Nevertheless, Jansson still accurately depicted the reflections of light in the water and indicated the actual locations of steeples and other prominent structures in the northern part of Stockholm.

Jansson's commitment to socialism is evident in his paintings of workers' tenements--one of the most common subjects in his oeuvre between 1893 and 1904. In *Outskirts of the City* (1899, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm), he depicted one of the numerous large housing projects built for workers on the outskirts of Stockholm. Although shown in daylight, the somber tonality endows the severe mass of the structure with a melancholy mood, similar to that noted in his cityscapes. By utilizing a rather bizarre, exceptionally low vantage point, Jansson endows the structure with a monumental force that may have been intended to suggest the latent power of the workers' political movements.

Jansson's political sympathies are most evident in *May Day Procession* (Folkets Hus, Stockholm). Under a stormy sky, a long procession of figures moves in a serpentine pattern across an immense plain. Resembling the wind-filled sails of an immense ocean vessel, red banners flutter above the procession.

The simple dark clothing, which Jansson is shown wearing in *Me: Self Portrait* (1901, Thielska Galleriet, Stockholm), also has been interpreted as an affirmation of his identification with the proletariat. With furrowed brows, Jansson stares out intently at the viewer, as if to emphasize the seriousness of his artistic endeavor. The half-length figure is placed before a wide window--possibly one in his apartment--overlooking the Riddarfjärden and the northern part of Stockholm. Although Jansson has painted his face tightly and smoothly, the rest of the picture is handled with the freedom characteristic of his cityscapes.

Patronage of Ernest Thiel

Upon the recommendation of Karl Nordström, the wealthy banker Ernest Thiel (1859-1947) visited Jansson's studio during the fall of 1898, and he and the artist developed an immediate rapport. One of the most perceptive and generous European patrons of the era, Thiel consistently supported the efforts of avant-garde writers and artists.

During his initial meeting with Jansson, Thiel bought three paintings. In subsequent years, Thiel assembled the largest single collection of Jansson's paintings, still on display at the Thielska Galleriet, built on his estate between 1904 and 1906 and donated to the city of Stockholm in 1924.

As a result of Thiel's support, both Jansson's professional standing and his economic circumstances had improved significantly by the beginning of the twentieth century. Because Thiel's acumen as a patron was widely recognized, many other wealthy collectors quickly followed his lead and began purchasing Jansson's cityscapes.

With Thiel's encouragement, Jansson modified his relatively simple lifestyle. In the early 1900s, Jansson became an active participant in the sophisticated nightlife of the Swedish capital. Moreover, during these years, he significantly modified his appearance, replacing the somber garb of workers with the elegant costume associated with dandies in Sweden: a white suit and shirt, worn with sandals.

Travels in Europe

Thiel also helped to subsidize the costs of the trips that Jansson made to other European countries between

1900 and 1903. In 1900, Jansson traveled for the first time outside Sweden--visiting the Universal Exposition in Paris and traveling to other French cities.

In 1901, Jansson traveled to Italy and Germany. In Venice, Jansson attended the opening of the Biennale, where three paintings by him were on display in the Swedish room. Considering his later subject matter, it is particularly interesting to note that Jansson reported to friends that, on this trip, he enjoyed visiting the bathhouses in Munich more than touring museums.

During a more extended trip to Italy in 1903, Jansson made many drawings of ancient Greek and Roman statues of nude male figures. These drawings provided an important resource for Jansson in subsequent years.

New subject matter

In 1904, Jansson produced what turned out to be his final view of Stockholm--*Österlånggatan* (Thielska Galleriet, Stockholm), depicting a narrow street, then occupied by tradesmen in the heart of the Old City. For three years between 1904 and 1907, Jansson systematically sought to retool himself as an artist, mastering the skills needed by a painter of nude male figures. He did not exhibit any of his new works until 1907.

The study of ancient classical sculpture during his trip to Italy is thought to have had a major impact on Jansson's change of subject matter. The poses and gestures of some figures in sketches that he executed from life between 1904 and 1907 recall ancient classical statues that he saw during his trip to Italy.

Many scholars have described his nude male figures as expressions of Open Air Vitalism, a positivistic movement, which was a predominant force in Swedish social and cultural life between 1904 and 1910. Adherents of this movement encouraged nudity as a means to intensify contact with the rejuvenating forces of the sun and natural forces.

However, it should be noted that Jansson's paintings of nude men differ in significant respects from those of Johan Axel Gustav Acke (1859-1924) and other artists associated with Open Air Vitalism. For example, rather than showing figures in lush rural settings as Acke did, Jansson represented men in urban settings and interiors. Seeking to express the union of men and nature, Acke and other Swedish artists deliberately blended figures with their environments, utilizing almost identical brushwork for bodies and vegetation. In contrast, Jansson clearly distinguished figures from their settings and emphasized their muscles and other anatomical features, including genitalia (which are depicted in a notably generalized fashion by Acke).

Jansson's representations of nude men may best be understood as expressions of his sexuality. In this regard, it is significant that Jansson's decision to focus upon the male figure corresponds with a period in which he seems to have been more open about his attraction to other men than he had been previously. Because of its association with Wilde and other cosmopolitan homosexuals, the costume of the dandy, adopted by Jansson during these years, can be regarded as a public indication of his sexual preference.

In the 1890s, Jansson repeatedly was characterized by his professional colleagues as very reticent about his personal life. However, by the early 1900s, Jansson is no longer described in this way, and his public association with younger working-class men is noted in private papers of his associates. For instance, letters exchanged by Nördstrom and Bergh in 1903 note with amusement the promenades that Eugène and his homosexual brother Adrian routinely made that year at Sandhamn (then an elegant "summer colony" of Stockholm) with their younger live-in companions, referred to only by their nicknames, Stomatol and Azymol.

Virtually all of Jansson's preserved drawings demonstrate a convincing rendering of anatomy that is truly remarkable for one who had not undertaken extensive formal studies in this field. Although the drawings of 1904 to 1907 already indicate his strong preference for younger athletic men, he portrays individuals with varied and distinctive facial features and body types.

Despite his use of ancient classical motifs, he succeeds in infusing his life studies with a naturalistic vitality, suggesting movements of muscles even in depictions of seated and standing figures. The soft, subtle handling of light and shade intensifies the sensual appeal of the sketched figures.

In looking at Jansson's drawings, one can understand why he insisted that his subjects were "voluntary models" and friends, rather than studio employees. Most of these men gaze at the artist/viewer with an intensity that is unusual in professional studies. In *Seated Young Man* (1906, private collection), for example, there is a definite implication of desire in the way that the model (Carl Gyllins) looks up at the artist/viewer.

Knut Nyman: *Young Man Standing in a Doorway*

Produced in 1906 and exhibited in 1907, the *Young Man Standing in a Doorway* (Thielska Galleriet, Stockholm) is the first large-scale painting of a nude male figure to be completed by Jansson. This work commemorates a major turning point in the artist's life--both professionally and personally.

Knut Nyman is shown in the center of a large interior doorway, arms lifted and outstretched to the doorjamb. He stands in a sensually curved contrapposto pose (i.e., most of his weight on one foot so that his shoulders and arms twist off-axis from the hips and legs), with his right knee projecting out toward the spectator. Sunlight streaming into the room behind him (apparently through unseen windows on a higher level) glistens on his flesh. The erotic appeal of this figure is undeniable.

Throughout much of the twentieth century, scholars generally overlooked the homoeroticism of the figure and interpreted the painting exclusively as a declaration of the artist's dedication to new themes. The paintings on the heavily shadowed walls in the gallery in the background resemble views that Jansson produced up to 1904. By turning his back to these paintings, Nyman indicates the artist's literal abandonment of his previous subject matter and his intention to develop his work in new ways.

As Eman has proposed, *Young Man in a Doorway* also can be understood as a declaration of the artist's love for Nyman. As if to encourage this reading of the picture, Jansson placed Nyman's name directly below his own signature on the canvas. Inscribed underneath the names of Jansson and Nyman, "1906" signifies not only the date of the painting's creation but also the year in which the two men began their relationship.

Jansson and Nyman became acquainted at the Flottans badhus, where they both enjoyed nude sunbathing and swimming. Photographs taken about 1910, showing Jansson and Nyman relaxing at the baths with friends, reveal the pleasure that they took in one another's company.

By 1907, Nyman had taken up residence in Jansson's studio, and they lived together until 1913. During this time, they were regarded as an inseparable couple in artistic circles. They were frequently seen together at elegant restaurants and other establishments in Stockholm.

Jansson provoked scandalized rumors by rejecting invitations to any events that did not welcome his partner. By refusing to conceal his relationship with Nyman, Jansson challenged the restrictive social and sexual conventions prevailing in his society in much the way that he did in his late paintings.

Flottans badhus

Between 1907 and 1911, Jansson made several monumental paintings of men at Stockholm's Flottans badhus, where he had become a frequent visitor by the late 1890s. Photographs of ca 1900 show Jansson swimming in the bathhouse pool. It is interesting to note that some of these images capture Jansson in mid-air in the same pose that he utilized for the divers in *Naval Bathhouse (Flottans badhus, 1907, Thielska Galleriet)* and *Bathhouse Scene (Badtavla, 1908, Konsthall, Öbrero)*.

During the period that Jansson created his scenes of the Flottans badhus, existing Swedish laws against sexual acts between men were being enforced with increased rigor. The baths provided a refuge from oppression because nude sunbathing and swimming were widely regarded as healthful activities. At the bathhouses, men could safely gaze at and associate with other naked men.

By the early twentieth century, the bathhouses of Stockholm were widely known to be gathering places for men who desired other men, and they attracted numerous homosexual visitors from all over Europe. Although sexual acts seldom took place at the baths, contacts made there often led to liaisons elsewhere and even to long term relationships, as in the case of Jansson and Nyman.

Jansson's procedure in creating the bathhouse paintings differed from the method that he had employed for his earlier cityscapes. Instead of painting from his imagination, Jansson made numerous preparatory sketches of men at the baths; one cannot help but wonder whether Jansson's intense attraction to his new subject matter led to this shift in process.

It should be noted that Jansson modified the sketched figures in some significant ways. For instance, at the baths, he drew men of different ages and of varying degrees of muscular development. In his completed paintings, Jansson populated the baths with the individuals whom he desired: handsome, younger, athletic men.

In the previously mentioned *Naval Bathhouse (1907)* and *Bathhouse Scene (1908)*, Jansson celebrates the beauty of the nude men swimming and relaxing around the pool. In both works, the prominent foreground figures stand in exaggerated versions of the elegant contrapposto pose used so effectively in *Young Man Standing in a Doorway*.

The glistening light reflected on their flesh enhances the sensual allure of the men. Helping to create a joyful mood, the colors are bright and glowing. Although blues dominate as in Jansson's cityscapes, they are not muted by the dark tonalities that he employed in his earlier paintings.

Through his skillful organization of figures, Jansson evokes the homoerotic desire that pervaded the bathhouse. Subtle inclinations of heads and other body movements suggest the glances exchanged among the men around the pool. Furthermore, Jansson has arranged the bodies so that one figure leads logically to the next. While preserving the harmony of the overall composition, he organized many of the men into pairs and groups of three. Within each of these groups, the poses of the men's bodies echo one another, thus evoking the sense of rapport that they experienced.

In *Swimming Pool (Badsump, 1911, private collection)*, Jansson has employed a very low perspective, corresponding to the viewpoint of a swimmer in the pool that fills the foreground space. From this vantage point, the background figures standing alongside the pool seem almost diminutive.

Upon first looking at *Swimming Pool*, one might suppose that Jansson's primary goal was to demonstrate the energy and prowess of the swimmers and divers. However, the pleasure that Jansson took in the sensual beauty of these men is expressed through the emphasis that he gave to their exposed buttocks and to their glistening flesh.

Although comparatively small in scale, the spectators at the edge of the pool in the background contribute significantly to the homoerotic mood of the painting. Many of the background figures are dressed as seamen, and the nude men, scattered among them, stand out provocatively. At least one of the nude figures seems to be fondling his genitals.

In the *Self Portrait* of 1910 (Nationalmuseum, Stockholm), Jansson depicted himself at the Flottans badhus in the company of beautiful young men. Although he routinely wore no clothes while at the baths, he depicts himself here in an elegant white linen suit, worn with sandals. The broad blue sash around his waist, the yellow tie, and the yellow and blue bands on his straw hat add lively color accents to his figure.

Some scholars have interpreted Jansson's decision to depict himself clothed as an indication of his isolation from others. However, by wearing a costume associated in Sweden with dandies, Jansson provides a clue to his desire for the men around him. Furthermore, the colors of his clothing associate him with the sailors scattered among the crowds around the pool. The sailors wear uniforms of white and blue, highlighted by patches of yellow light, representing reflections of the sun.

Athletes in Interiors

Between 1911 and 1914, Jansson also celebrated the nude male figure in numerous large-scale paintings of athletes lifting weights and performing acrobatic exercises in interior spaces. He executed these paintings in the provisional studio that he established at the Flottans badhus, which was clearly a dominant presence in his later career. His decision to base an important part of his artistic practice in a locale associated with the emerging homosexual culture provides yet another indication of his willingness to flout repressive conventions.

Sailors whom Jansson met at the bathhouse served as models for many of the studio paintings of athletes, but he also featured his partner Nyman in some of them. In *Athletes (Atleter, 1912, Prins Eugens Waldemarsudde, Stockholm)*, Nyman is shown seated on the floor in a pose that recalls the famous ancient Hellenistic statue *Dying Gaul* (ca 240 B. C. E., Capitoline Museum, Rome).

Demonstrating his strength, Nyman supports a large iron ball with his right arm, extended straight upwards above his head. As in *Young Man Standing in a Doorway*, bright sunlight from an unseen source emphasizes Nyman's physical splendor by accenting the contours of his body. Seen from behind, an athletic young man standing in the foreground doorway admires Nyman.

In his effort to visualize the exertions of athletes shown in his studio paintings, Jansson occasionally sacrificed the graceful beauty that he achieved in the pool scenes. For instance, in two paintings of 1914 now in private collections--*Barbell Lifted with a Single Arm II (Pressning av stång på en arm II)* and *Barbell Lifted with Two Arms II (Pressning av stång på två armar II)*--Jansson so strongly emphasizes the bulges of the strained muscles and tendons that the contours of the figures seem irregular and jagged.

Furthermore, in order to enhance the impression of athletic exertion, Jansson employed a modified version of the distinctive handling of paint evident in his cityscapes. Among the formal devices that help to convey the strain of muscles are roughly applied, thick strokes of impasto (opaque oil paint) and jagged lines cut into the paint surface with the edge of a palette knife.

In the stunning *Acrobats* (1912, Thielska Galleriet), an athlete standing on the studio floor uses his upraised arms to support the full weight of his colleague, whose legs are extended straight in the air above his head. As in his paintings of weightlifters, rough handling of paint and irregular contours help to emphasize muscular strain. Nevertheless, the fact that the figure suspended in air exactly echoes the appearance and pose of the acrobat standing on the floor serves to endow this work with an aura of almost Neoclassical harmony and balance. Thus, despite their exertions, these sunlit figures establish a serene mood that

seems to foreshadow the work of David Hockney, as Claustrat has suggested.

Late Experimental Figurative Paintings

During the final three years of his life, Jansson also created a group paintings that are distinguished from the previously discussed works by their boldly stylized construction of the figures. Typical examples are *Two Wrestlers* (*Två brottare*, 1912, private collection) and *Sailors' Ball* (*Matrosbal*, 1912, Sjöhistoriska Museet, Stockholm).

In these pieces, Jansson pushed his experimental handling of paint techniques further than in any other works. Instead of trying to record the appearance of body parts, he utilized the component elements of his art to create formal equivalents to them. Thus, in *Two Wrestlers*, thick parallel ridges of paint serve to indicate the strained muscles of their legs. Similarly, long, gently curved strokes in the *Sailors' Ball* evoke the swaying movements of the dance.

As in these examples, most of the pictures in this group show clothed figures in public venues, such as dance halls and circus arenas. Also in contrast to his other figurative paintings, Jansson includes women in these scenes, although in such secondary roles as dance partners and spectators.

Reception of Jansson's Late Figurative Works

Jansson's figurative paintings were greeted with much less enthusiasm than his earlier cityscapes, and they generally received only lukewarm praise from critics. However, Thiel, who purchased the *Naval Bathhouse* in 1907, remained a loyal patron.

Prins Eugen, the youngest son of King Oscar II, who broke with royal protocol by becoming a painter himself and exhibiting works with the Artists' Union (which he was, however, not allowed to join), also collected prominent examples of Jansson's late figurative works. In 1914, Prins Eugen purchased *Weightlifter* (1911), and in 1918, he acquired *Young Man Standing in a Doorway* (1907) and *Athletes* (1912). All these works are now on view at Waldemarsudde, his estate, which became a public museum after his death in 1947.

The highly publicized Olympic Exhibition organized by the Artists' Union in 1912 prominently featured several of Jansson's paintings of athletes. These were the focus of the most extended analyses of Jansson's figurative work to be published during his lifetime.

The art critic Tor Hedberg characterized Jansson's late paintings as an important and original contribution to Swedish art. In particular, he praised the naturalistic modeling of the nude bodies and the sense of atmospheric light infusing the scenes.

However, most other commentators expressed significant reservations about Jansson's late work, and they characterized his attention to body parts as excessive and exaggerated. From a queer perspective of the early twenty-first century, one cannot help but consider these remarks as oblique (perhaps unconscious) indications of the writers' discomfort with the homoeroticism of Jansson's figures.

Although not mentioned in any published commentary, the erotic power of Jansson's paintings of athletes was noted by the homosexual artist Gösta Adrian-Nilsson (1884-1965). In comments that he made in his diary shortly after visiting the Olympic Exhibition, Adrian-Nilsson claimed that the expression of sexual desire was the primary purpose of Jansson's late paintings.

However, despite the fact that he shared Jansson's sexual orientation, Adrian-Nilsson condemned Jansson's focus on material beauty and his apparent disinclination to express higher spiritual ideals. It should be

emphasized that Adrian-Nilsson's comments reflect his own commitment to abstraction and that he almost certainly was not condemning the artist's lifestyle from a moralizing perspective.

The late paintings continued to be regarded with disdain in the years following Jansson's death. Thus, despite the strong advocacy of Karl Nördstrom, the prominent writer and collector Klas Fåhraeus refused to include any of Jansson's figurative works in the major exhibition of contemporary Swedish art that he organized at the Liljevalchs Gallery, Stockholm, in 1918. Fåhraeus justified the exclusion of these works by claiming that the Swedish public was not prepared to accept such naturalistic depictions of nude male bodies.

Jansson's Final Year

On January 16, 1915, Jansson suffered a cerebral hemorrhage, which left him paralyzed on one side. For the remainder of his life, he was cared for by Rudolf Rydström (called Rulle), who had been trained as both a wrestler and a nurse.

Rydström had become well known in artistic circles as the model for the predominant nude figure in Carl Larsson's *Sacrifice for Winter Solstice* (1914-15), a monumental painting, originally intended for the Nationalmuseum, Stockholm. Rydström perfectly exemplified the type of younger athletic man that most appealed to Jansson.

In a diary entry of May 12, 1915, Nördstrom described a recent visit to Jansson's home. In eloquent prose, Nördstrom revealed how deeply touched he had been by the exceptional tenderness that Rydström displayed as he cared for Jansson, and he also noted the contentment that Jansson seemed to feel in Rydström's company.

On June 15, 1915, Jansson died after suffering another cerebral hemorrhage.

Destruction of Jansson's Private Papers

Shortly after Jansson's death, his younger brother, Adrian, destroyed Eugène's private drawings and personal papers, presumably because he thought that these materials could tarnish Eugène's posthumous reputation. Obviously, we cannot be sure of the subjects of the drawings, but it seems likely that they included sexually explicit imagery. Undoubtedly, Jansson's diaries would have constituted a valuable resource for queer historians of his art and life.

While lamentable from a scholarly perspective, Adrian's actions are fully comprehensible within the context of his times. Adrian was a friend of Nils Santesson, whose highly publicized trial for sodomy in 1906 stimulated public outrage against homosexuality, which led to increased surveillance of homosexuals and to intensified enforcement of laws against same-sex sexual acts. Despite his association with Santesson, Adrian managed to escape detection in the police investigations of his friends and acquaintances.

The legal authorities resolved to make an example of Santesson, who, as the director of a leading pewter foundry, was well known in artistic circles. Therefore, he was given an unusually severe sentence of ten months hard labor for committing "unnatural" sexual acts. His reputation destroyed, Santesson was unable to resume his former career after being released from prison.

After Santesson moved to Paris in 1912, Adrian maintained a steady correspondence with him. Although Adrian managed to destroy documentation of his brother's sexuality, the letters he exchanged with Santesson were preserved, and these provide valuable insights into the homosexual subculture in Sweden during his lifetime.

Conclusions

Without access to his private papers, queer historians have had to depend on innuendos by his associates as they seek to reconstruct the details of Jansson's personal life. However, his art works provide compelling evidence of his queer perspectives.

The splendid *Young Man Standing in a Doorway* remains a compelling affirmation of the power of queer love to flourish even in a homophobic society. In his monumental paintings of Stockholm's Naval Bathhouse, Jansson captured the emergence of a community of men bound together by mutual desire.

In 2008, Jansson's *Self Portrait* of 1910 was featured prominently in the *Queer--Desire, Power, and Identity* show at the Nationalmuseum, Stockholm. This exhibition provided belated official acknowledgement of an aspect of his work that his contemporaries preferred to deny or ignore.

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